telephone exchanges through underground cable, overhead lines. A new exchange is planned to install when there is a registered demand of 10 or more and the demand cannot be met from an existing exchange within the Short Distance Charging Area (SDCA).

(b) All the villages and village panchayats are planned to be provided with the telecom facilities by March, 2002.

Setting up of National Commission for Telecommunications

1750. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to set up a National Commission for Telecommunications;

(b) if so, the steps taken in this regard; and

(c) what other steps are being taken to modernise and for expansion of the telecommunication network both in urban as well as rural areas?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) and (b) Sir, a Group has been constituted under the chairmanship of the Finance Minister with one of the mandates to prepare the draft of new legislation to replace Indian Telegraph Act, 1885; keeping in view the rapid convergence of telecom, computers, television and electronics. The Group is examining all these aspects. The Group has not yet submitted its report.

(c) Following steps are being taken to modernise and for expansion of telecom network;

(i) Replacing Technologically obsolete switches with digital switches and introducing Modern Technologies like Wireless in Local Loop (WLL), Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) in Telecom Network.

(ii) New Technologies like WLL, C-DOT, TDMA/PMP and Satellite based telephones for rural Telecom Network are being inducted.

(iii) Setting up of Internet nodes at SSA level and making available sufficient band with for the spread of Internet.

(iv) Provision of telephone on demand with the involvement of private service providers in Telecom Network.

(v) Provision of telephones in all villages by March 2002 with participation of private sector.

(vi) Provision of STD facility in all telephone exchanges of Telecom Network.

Objection by Ministry of Finance to free telephone connections

1751. SHRI SURESH KALMADI:
SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question 180 given in the Rajya Sabha on 25th July, 2000 and state whether the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance has raised any objections for the same; if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): Sir, Ministry of Finance had raised certain issues relating to change of service conditions etc. and desired consultation before any decision is taken. This process has been duly gone through. However, no formal orders have been issued so far in view of stay granted by Hon'ble High Court of Kerala.

Adoption of Norms by TRAI for fixed services providers

1752. SHRI PARMESHWAR KUMAR AGARWALLA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Telecom Regulatory Authority is presently examining the licencing norms to be adopted for fixed services providers;

(b) if so, by when a final recommendation will be made; and

(c) what are the areas of issue that are being covered?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Final recommendations are likely to be made by end of August, 2000.

(c) Issues being covered are:

(i) Number of private service providers in a Circle besides Department of Telecommunication Operations.